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FOUR DEFENDANTS RECEIVE PRISON TERMS AND FINES OF \$10,000
EACH FOR MARRIAGE FRAUD SCHEME

FRESNO – United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that HARBANS KAUR HOTH, 53; PARAMJIT SINGH TAGGAR, 46; GURDEEP SINGH ATWAL, 44, all from Fresno; and PRITAM KAUR, 37, from San Jose, California, were each sentenced to a four-month term of imprisonment, a \$10,000 fine, and a three-year term of supervised release for their convictions for conspiracy to make false statements against the United States.

U.S. District Judge Oliver W. Wanger imposed the sentences at the conclusion of a sentencing hearing on May 23, 2006. He permitted each defendant to serve a portion of his or her four-month term of incarceration on home confinement with electronic monitoring. He imposed an upward departure from U.S. Sentencing Guidelines based on the extensive and persistent nature of the frauds that were committed by the defendants.

The case was the product of an extensive investigation by the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement Office in Fresno, California, acting on a tip from the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services, conducted in the United States and in India with assistance from the investigations branch of the Fresno County District Attorney's Office.

According to Assistant United States Attorney David Gappa, who prosecuted the case, the defendants previously admitted in plea agreements that from January 1994 through October 2004, they conspired to obtain immigration benefits for defendants ATWAL and KAUR, to which they were not entitled, by means of filing applications with immigration authorities that contained false statements. Defendants HOTH and TAGGAR, natives of India and naturalized United States citizens, had been married and were raising two children together. The couple obtained a divorce for the purpose of entering into sham marriages with defendants ATWAL and KAUR. Defendants HOTH and TAGGAR then traveled to India to marry defendants ATWAL and KAUR, respectively, for the purpose of filing visa petitions for them to enter the United States. TAGGAR, ATWAL, and KAUR are siblings. The defendants filed numerous applications for additional benefits, including United States citizenship, that contained false statements about their marriages, residences, and other facts. Defendants ATWAL and KAUR are aliens and will face proceedings to remove them to India at the completion of their terms of imprisonment.

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